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Informants by the Hundreds: FBI Penetration of the CPUSA

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ABSTRACT

Examination of the role of FBI informants in the Communist Party of the United States of America from its formation until the 1970s indicates that FBI recruitment of informants and penetration of the CPUSA was smaller during the Party's heyday in the 1930s than during its decline after World War II and collapse in the 1960s and 1970s. FBI efforts to recruit informants produced a significant number of valuable assets and stoked Party paranoia.

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A standing joke during the Cold War was that without the dues paid to the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) by Federal Bureau of Investigation informants within its ranks, the Party would go bankrupt. Aware that it was the target, not only of the United States government, but also of private organizations, the CPUSA constantly focused on uncovering and expelling infiltrators. Both vulnerable to its enemies and intolerant of dissent, it frequently ousted members suspected of being plants, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia within its ranks. Sometimes those accused to being spies were guilty. Often, however, the accusations were based on petty jealousies or leadership rivalries. Sometimes, they resulted from deliberate provocations by the FBI, but the most valuable government informants were never suspected by Party leaders.

Starting in the 1990s but gaining momentum in the 2000s as the declassification of US Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Bureau of Investigation files accelerated, historians have gained a more comprehensive understanding of the extent of government infiltration of the CPUSA. Many thousands of files have not yet been released and extensive redactions in those that have limit transparency. Nonetheless, enough has been made public that a first attempt at surveying government infiltration of the CPUSA is now possible.¹

In the Party's often chaotic early years from 1919 to 1922, the DOJ and the FBI (then entitled the Bureau of Investigation) recruited a hand-full of sources. Some were motivated by the pay the DOJ offered, others by appeals to patriotism. But the government's interest in the small communist party faded by the mid-1920s and did not revive

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¹A number of FBI files on informants are collected at: https://archive.org/details/ernie1241_fbiinformants. The FBI also recruited numerous informants in other communist organizations. For an account of informants within the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, see Margaret Jayko, ed. *FBI on Trial: The Victory in the Socialist Workers Party Suit Against Government Spying* (Pathfinder Press; New York, 1988). For infiltration of the Maoist movement, see Aaron Leonard and Conor Gallagher, *Heavy Radicals: The FBI's Secret War on American Maoists* (Zero Books, Washington, 2014).

significantly until the 1930s. The pace of recruitment picked up in the 1940s, but it was in the 1950s and 1960s that the FBI developed its largest numbers of informants inside the CPUSA. Recruitment was easier then because the ideological loyalties of many party members had been strained by Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes and the tensions of the Cold War. Thus, the FBI had had relatively few informants in the 1930s during the Party's most successful era, but its most extensive infiltration came when the CPUSA was at the nadir of its political influence.

Informants are a separate category from individuals who were expelled from or quit the CPUSA and then agreed to cooperate with the FBI or other government agencies and testify or provide information about their activities or other people whom they knew in the Party. Many of these defectors have been well known to historians because they publicly testified to congressional investigative committees and/or wrote books and articles, a number cited in this essay, about their life in the CPUSA.²

The Early Years

From the Party's first days, some of its leaders were accused of being government agents or employees of private security companies. Louis Fraina, one of its founders, was falsely charged with being an agent of the Department of Justice in 1919. His accuser, Ferdinand Peterson, was himself on the DOJ payroll, making this the first known incident of a government informant disrupting communist activities by falsely charging a loyal communist with being an informant. In a Party trial Jacob Nosovitsky, another DOJ agent, served as Fraina's de facto lawyer, and he was exonerated, enabling Nosovitsky to travel with him to a 1920 Comintern meeting in Amsterdam and report everything that transpired. Fraina successfully endured two more trials in Moscow, but the taint stuck to him for years, even after he had abandoned communism.³

Frances Morrow, a shipfitter and Party member, was working for the DOJ when he was selected to attend an underground Party convention in Bridgman, Michigan in 1922. It was raided by the FBI on August 22 and Morrow, who had been chosen to help bury the convention's records, duly revealed their location, enabling the government to obtain a treasure trove of internal Party documents used in subsequent trials of leading communist officials.⁴

Herbert M. "Harry" Wicks was a founding Party member. In the 1920s he held a variety of senior positions in the CPUSA. Accused in 1923 of having betrayed a factional rival to immigration authorities, he was exonerated by a Party investigating commission. The Communist International sent him to Australia in 1930 where he carried out a

²One of the best known was Elizabeth Bentley. Bentley was active in the CPUSA in the mid-1930s but was quickly transferred to assist Party cooperation with Soviet intelligence. Thereafter her story was more one of espionage than Party activities. Bentley, Elizabeth. *Out of Bondage: The Story of Elizabeth Bentley*. New York: Devin-Adair, 1951. The FBI made a brief unsuccessful attempt to reinsert her into KGB activities but by that point the KGB knew that she had defected. Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Red Spy Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth Bentley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) concluded that as the years passed Bentley embellished, exaggerated, romanticized, and even lied about details, but that the heart of her story was true. Lauren Kessler, *Clever Girl: Elizabeth Bentley's Life In and Out of Espionage* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003) was more positive.

³On Fraina, Peterson, and Nosovitsky, see Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, Viking Press, 1957), 100, 227–36, 252–54, 293, 439–40 n. 22 & n. 24.

⁴Draper, *Roots*, 366–72.

rigorous purge of dissident elements in its communist party. On his return to the US in 1931, Wicks was assigned to less important positions. Finally, in 1937 he was charged with having been a police spy inside the early Communist movement and perhaps throughout his career in the Party. This time he was expelled. In 1957 he authored a book on the Russian revolution insisting that the communist movement had degraded into an instrument of enslavement of workers. FBI files on Wicks show that in 1919 he had worked as an informant in the communist movement for the Illinois Steel Company and the Chicago police but there was no indication that his contact with security authorities continued after that date. Following his expulsion from the CPUSA, he cooperated with the FBI and US immigration authorities on some investigations but balked at helping on others. Consequently, the FBI judged him unreliable.⁵

The 1930s

During the 1920s the Party leadership expelled large numbers of Loreists, Trotskyists, and Lovestoneists, usually on grounds they opposed the Comintern, but often with an added fillip that they were assisting the US authorities to weaken or destroy the communist movement. To monitor and investigate membership, in the 1930s a “Control Commission” disciplined or expelled those who refused to toe the Party line. Although its primary targets were ideological dissidents, it also sought to root out informants. There is no good estimate of how many of those accused, mostly rank-and-file members, were really cooperating with local police, private businesses, or security services and how many were just victims of having offended some Party official.

Beginning in 1938, the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities (better known as the Dies Committee) launched investigations of communist activity. Disgruntled fellow-travelers and ex-Communists testified, stoking Party paranoia. The most prominent, one-time fellow-traveler extraordinaire, J.B. Matthews, and expelled Party leader Benjamin Gitlow, were motivated by ideological disillusionment and resentment. Neither had been an informant while in or close to the Party. In 1939 John Spivak, a journalist who also worked in the CPUSA underground apparatus, was sent to California to root out spies working for the Associated Farmers, which represented major agricultural interests in the state, and which had sent informers into the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing Allied Workers of America (CIO), a communist-influenced union that was attempting to organize farm workers, and possibly into the local CPUSA as well. Steve Nelson and Rudy Baker, California CPUSA leaders, praised Spivak’s work but provided no details of any informants he may have uncovered. A 1939-40 investigation by the LaFollette Senate Civil Liberties Committee documented the Associated Farmers’ sustained and harsh campaign against UCAPAWA and reported accusations that it had infiltrated the union but did not identify specific infiltrators or informants.⁶

⁵Harvey Klehr, “Wicks, Harry” in *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, eds. Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 414–15; H. M. Wicks, *Eclipse of October* (Chicago: Challenge Publishers, 1957).

⁶On the Dies committee, see: Nancy Lynn Lopez, “‘Allowing Fears to Overwhelm Us’: A Re-Examination of the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938–1944.” Ph.D. diss. Rice University, 2002; August Raymond Ogden, *The Dies Committee: A Study of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944*

The FBI had largely withdrawn from internal security and investigation of subversion from the mid-1920s until 1936. Concerned about the growing appeal of Nazism and fascism, President Roosevelt ordered the Bureau to revive its coverage of subversive threats. J. Edgar Hoover welcomed the mandate, but it took several years for the FBI to develop techniques and sufficient knowledge to become effective. After the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the beginning of WWII in September 1939, the CPUSA jettisoned its support for the New Deal. In response, the Roosevelt Administration cracked down on communist activities. Party leader Earl Browder was convicted of passport fraud and imprisoned, other prominent communists faced deportation, and state and local governments launched legal attacks. Not coincidentally, the FBI stepped up efforts to infiltrate the Party, recruiting informants among those already within the CPUSA, and seeking out people to join the Party and report on it.

The FBI conducted one broad-ranging investigation of Soviet espionage and the CPUSA, the Comintern Apparatus (COMRAP) investigation (FBI file 100-203581) that in December 1944 produced a 600 page "Comintern Apparatus Summary Report." While concluding that Soviet espionage was occurring, it also indicates that the Bureau knew few specifics, and was unable, to clearly separate Soviet espionage from activities of the CPUSA that were clandestine in nature but not linked to foreign espionage. The summary report suggests that the FBI made extensive use of informants in the investigation but that none of the informants were senior or even mid-level Party figures. No informants are identifiable in the summary. A smaller investigation, CINRAD (Communist Infiltration of Radiation Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, FBI file 100-190625) also used informants but redactions in the released files makes it difficult to say much about them.

Post-World War II

Once the House of Representatives transformed Dies' temporary committee into a standing committee in 1945 (the House Committee on Un-American Activities), the stage was set for a parade of former communists to testify over the next decade about their activities in the CPUSA. Most, like Louis Budenz, Bella Dodd, Paul Crouch, and Whittaker Chambers, were disillusioned ex-radicals who had left the Party and were willing to testify against it. None had been in touch with the FBI before their defections.

Budenz, one-time editor of the *Daily Worker*, underwent a spiritual crisis in 1945, left the CPUSA and was received into the Roman Catholic church by Bishop Fulton Sheen at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Through congressional testimony and a series of books, he excoriated his former comrades and was a key witness in the first Smith Act trial. Bella Dodd, a member of the National Committee, expelled in 1945 on

(Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945); J. B. Matthews, *Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler* (New York: Mount Vernon Publishers, 1938); Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York: Dutton, 1940); On Spivak and California labor spies, see: Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 125-28; Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor," *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor* (United States Senate. Part 52. Los Angeles, CA, US Government Printing Office, DC 1940); Daniel Cletus, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1981), 252-53.

grounds she sympathized with expelled former Party leader Earl Browder, testified before Congress and wrote an autobiography. Crouch had been imprisoned in the 1920s for communist organizing among fellow American soldiers in Hawaii. After his release he served as a Party organizer in North Carolina, Virginia, Utah, Alabama and California, but was expelled for insubordination in 1942. He finally approached the FBI in 1948 and testified before HUAC the following year.⁷

By far, the most prominent Communist defector was Whittaker Chambers, a talented journalist who had joined the CPUSA in the 1920s, given up a career as editor of *New Masses* to enter the Communist underground, and, fearing becoming a victim of Stalin's purge of the USSR's security services, dropped out in 1938. Chambers first talked to a government official in 1939 and was interviewed by the FBI during World War II. He did not, however, discuss his espionage activities in any detail until testifying before HUAC in 1948 and during depositions for a libel suit filed against him by Alger Hiss.⁸

While shaken by these defectors, the CPUSA quickly denounced them as embittered and vengeful malcontents, who had lied about their importance in the Party and concocted tall tales about their comrades in order to obtain money and favors from anti-communist congressional committees and the FBI. Given how many ex-communists there were and how many mid-level cadres had been expelled or otherwise parted company with the movement, it is not surprising that a certain number would have been willing to cooperate with the American government. For the Party, their testimony only confirmed their apostasy.

The Smith Act trials, however, highlighted a new threat to Party security, allowing the FBI and Justice Department to deploy some of the informants it had accumulated in the early 1940s. In July 1945, Assistant FBI Director Milton Ladd reported to J. Edgar Hoover:

we presently have 268 paid informants on Communists and we are paying them an average of a little over [amount redacted] per month for the information and assistance they are rendering to the Bureau. In reviewing these informants it is noted that 217 of them are members of the Communist Political Association, many of them holding official positions with their particularly branch of the Association. 9 of them are members of the American Youth For Democracy, the successor organization to the Young Communist League which is a front organization for the CPA. 13 of these informants are furnishing us with trash basket material from CPA or AYD headquarters. These latter informants are paid very small amounts but the information we receive from them has been very valuable and of great assistance to the Bureau in following the activities of these organizations as it is usually in written form.⁹

⁷Louis F. Budenz, *This is My Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947); Louis F. Budenz, *Men Without Faces: The Communist Conspiracy in the U. S. A.* (New York: Harper, 1950); Jimmy Randall Grant, "Louis Francis Budenz: The Origins of a Professional Ex-Communist" (Ph.D. diss. University of South Carolina, 2006); Robert M. Lichtman, "Louis Budenz, the FBI, and the 'List of 400 Concealed Communists': an extended tale of McCarthy-era informing," *American Communist History*, 3,1, 2004, pp. 25-50; Bella Visono Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York: P.J. Kenedy, 1954); Kenneth Waltzer, "Dodd, Bella," *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 112-13; On Crouch, see Gregory S. Taylor, *The Life and Lies of Paul Crouch: Communist, Opportunist, Cold War Snitch*. (University Press of Florida, Gainesville, FA, 2014); Paul Crouch, "Anatomy of a Front," *Plain Talk Magazine* (March 1949), 7-132.

⁸Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952); Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013); Sam Tanenhaus, *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1997); *Spies*, 1-31.

⁹D.M. Ladd to Director FBI, 07/07/1945, FBI Informants 1945 Summary, FBI file HQ 66-2542-3-313, 1-3.

Passed by Congress in 1940 and signed into law by President Roosevelt, the Smith Act made it a crime to conspire to teach or advocate the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. It was initially used to prosecute American fascists and Trotskyists in the Socialist Workers Party (the latter prosecution had CPUSA support). Eleven top Party leaders went on trial in 1949 and more than one hundred were indicted and prosecuted in subsequent years. At the first trial Budenz was the government's key witness on the teaching of communism. More shocking to the defendants was the surprise testimony of FBI informants who had infiltrated their ranks and been members in good standing until the moment of their appearances in court. Several, such as Charles Nicodemus, Garfield Herron, Thomas Younglove, and John Victor Blanc had joined the CPUSA around 1945 at the urging of the FBI. The two most damaging informants in 1949 were Herbert Philbrick, an advertising executive from Boston, and Angela Calomiris, a New York photographer.

In 1940 Philbrick, then in his mid-20s and opposed to war on religious grounds, had become active in the Cambridge Youth Council in Massachusetts, attracted by its agitation against American involvement in the war in Europe. He quickly realized that the Council was covertly controlled by the CPUSA and went to the FBI, which immediately recruited him as an informant and encouraged him to remain active and report on what he observed. He served as an informant for the next nine years, first in the Council, then the Young Communist League, and finally the CPUSA itself, when he was accepted as a member in 1944. He led a party branch consisting largely of professionals who concealed their membership. After he surfaced as a government witness Philbrick testified to congressional committees and as a prosecution witness in several legal assaults on the party. His best-selling book, *I Led 3 Lives: Citizen, "Communist," Counterspy*, was turned into a hit television series. Between his book, the television series, and lecture fees Philbrick made a comfortable income. Philbrick was generally accurate in his testimony in courts and before Congress and *I Led 3 Lives* (the book, not the over-dramatized TV series) was a reliable account of what he observed as a low- to middle-level party activist. He also stayed close to the FBI and accepted its advice about his public announcements.¹⁰

Calomiris, daughter of Greek immigrants, was an aspiring young photographer who had wandered into Party circles through the Communist-led Photo League in Greenwich Village. In 1942 the FBI approached her and asked to her to become an informant. The offer appealed to her as exciting and also as a way to fully establish her American identity. She served in a variety of low-level Party posts in New York City and later testified about those she had known in the Party and its ideological education about its revolutionary goals. The FBI was pleased with her testimony, particularly her cool response to a ferocious defense cross-examination. Calomiris was a lesbian, and the FBI was nervous that, if revealed in court, her sexual orientation might discredit her. (It was not.) Calomiris insisted in her testimony that the FBI had only reimbursed her expenses and had not paid her a stipend. That was untrue; by the time she testified she was receiving \$225 a month. While the FBI did not attempt to correct the court record,

¹⁰Herbert Arthur Philbrick, *I Led 3 Lives: Citizen, "Communist," Counterspy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952); Veronica A. Wilson, "Anticommunism, Millenarianism and the Challenges of Cold War Patriarchy: The Many Lives of FBI Informant Herbert Philbrick," *American Communist History* 8, no. 1 (June 2009), 73–102.

her lies and lifestyle led the Bureau to keep her at arms-length. After the trial she wrote a mildly successful autobiography, *Red Masquerade*, and lectured on her experiences for a few years. In the early 1960s she moved to Provincetown, MA, opened a bed-and-breakfast, thoroughly immersed herself in the gay community and later bought and managed several vacation properties.¹¹

Philbrick's and Calomiris's testimony led the CPUSA to intensify efforts to root out informants and, in so doing, it compounded the damage she had done. John Lautner, a Hungarian-born Party cadre, had immigrated to the United States as a young man. After joining the CPUSA in 1929, he held several middle-level positions. During World War II he was assigned to Army psychological (propaganda) warfare in North Africa and Italy. Afterwards, he headed the Party's Hungarian National Bureau. In 1947 he was made chief of the CPUSA's New York state "Review Commission" as the disciplinary Control Commissions were now termed. Since New York held about half of the CPUSA's membership, this was a major Party post.

Shortly before her testimony Calomiris had been investigated by Lautner's review commission, in part because of her sexual orientation. She was reassigned to another Party branch where she became financial secretary. After her testimony, Lautner was blamed for permitting a security lapse. At the same time, a Stalin-inspired purge in Hungary swept up one of Lautner's acquaintances from the war, who claimed under torture that Lautner was an American intelligence officer. Foiled by American travel restrictions when it tried to send Lautner to Hungary where he would have been arrested, the CPUSA lured him to Cleveland in January 1950 where he was stripped, threatened with torture, and interrogated by a Party security squad demanding he confess to being a US government agent. Lautner wrote out a confession and was released. The *Daily Worker* announced on January 17th that he had been expelled from the Party as "an enemy agent of long standing" and a "traitor and enemy of the working class." Lautner's wife, a long-time CPUSA member who was threatened with expulsion, immediately divorced him, and his friends and associates from his more than twenty years in the Party shunned all contact with him.

Lautner had never been a government agent, but his treatment destroyed every bit of loyalty he felt to his former comrades. He wrote to the FBI in September 1950 offering to give his "fullest cooperation to the aims and objectives of your organization." Having destroyed the Party career and family of a devoted Communist, the CPUSA paid the price. After the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Smith Act in 1951, the government began a series of prosecutions of state-level Party leaders. Lautner's first appearance was at the trial of the so-called "second string" New York-area Communists in 1952, and he quickly became the most-used government witness, testifying to devastating effect against more than 100 Party figures.¹²

At the same trial where Lautner debuted, the government unveiled its newest- and soon-to-become- most controversial informant, Harvey Matusow. Born in 1926, a brash, self-promoting go-getter, Matusow got involved with the Party's youth group after

¹¹Angela Calomiris. *Red Masquerade: Undercover for the F. B. I.* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1950; Veronica A. Wilson, 'I chose the values I regarded as American': Sexuality, ethnicity, and FBI informant Angela Calomiris, *Twentieth Century Communism*, 20 (2021), 109-135.

¹²Thomas Sakmyster. "The 'Lautner Affair' and the American Communist Party," *American Communist History* 9, 3 (December 2010) 257-91.

serving in the Army during the war. He joined the CPUSA in 1947 and soon had won a trip to Puerto Rico for selling 326 subscriptions to its newspaper. He briefly worked at Party headquarters and its summer camp. Criticized for “white chauvinism” in 1950 he contacted the FBI in the spring and offered his services, receiving \$40 a month plus expenses. Quickly falling under suspicion, he was expelled from the CPUSA as an “enemy agent” in January 1951 and immediately dropped as an informer by the FBI.

Matusow soon hooked up with the House Committee on Un-American Activities and testified as an expert on communist involvement with “youth,” opining on its use of sex as a lure to draw in members. The Justice Department then enlisted him to testify at the New York Smith Act trial, where he implicated three defendants with teaching about the need to violently overthrow the government. Matusow rode a wave of publicity; he was featured in stories in the New York press, called to testify in the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee hearings on Owen Latimore (he claimed that while working in the CPUSA bookstore he had been ordered to push Latimore’s *Solution in Asia* as reflecting the Party line). He then worked for Senator Joseph McCarthy, helped convict Clinton Jencks, a Communist labor figure, for falsifying a noncommunist affidavit, and testified before the Subversive Activities Control Board.

The FBI had originally been reluctant to enlist Matusow as an informant and its unease only deepened as it became aware of contradictions in his statements. In 1955 Matusow wrote *False Witness*, admitting to perjury, and provided affidavits that led to the reversal of convictions of two of the Smith Act defendants and Jencks. Convicted of perjury for claiming that U.S. Attorney Roy Cohen had suborned his own false statements and sentenced to five years in prison, Matusow joined the Mormon Church after his release and engaged in a variety of careers, ranging from music impresario to children’s theater and public access cable television. He died in 2001.¹³

Matusow was the poster boy for informant bad behavior, but he was hardly the only example. Matt Cvetic, who held a series of low-level positions in the Pittsburgh district of the CPUSA beginning in 1943, was born in 1909 into a Slovenian immigrant family. He finished two years of high school before drifting through a number of jobs. He beat his wife, failed to support her, was charged with assault and battery for injuring his sister-in-law, and drank heavily. First approached by the FBI in April 1941 and asked to keep an eye out for Communists, Cvetic was one of several informants recruited during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, when communist-inspired strikes were hampering war industries. Two other western FBI Pennsylvania recruits, George Dietze and Joseph Mazzei, were also approached in this period (Cvetic named both of them as fellow communists in an appearance before HUAC in 1950).

After attending communist-led demonstrations and meetings, Cvetic joined the CPUSA in February 1943. In addition to writing reports on the events he attended, Cvetic also supplied the Bureau with press releases, printed material and letters sent out by the Party, and claimed he had identified some 1,000 Party members. The FBI was appreciative, especially noting the value of his information on the Party’s work among

¹³Harvey Matusow. *False Witness* (Cameron & Kahn: New York, 1955); Robert Lichtman & Ronald Cohen, “Harvey Matusow, the FBI, and the Justice Department: Becoming a Government Informer-Witness in the McCarthy Era, *American Communist History*, June 2002, 43–68. The CPUSA conducted a purge of “white chauvinism” in 1950 that ensnared many members.

immigrants; he was employed by such communist fronts as the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief and the American Slav Congress. By 1947 he was receiving a stipend of \$85 a week, more than he had ever earned from regular employment.

By the following year Cvetic's usefulness was ebbing; he had indiscreetly told several friends about his undercover role. He was slated to be a witness in the first Smith Act trial, but the prosecution decided he was not needed. He was dropped as an informant in January 1950 and quickly developed a second career testifying as a government witness in deportation cases and before HUAC, eleven appearances in 1950 alone. A Warner Brothers movie, "I Was A Communist For the FBI," and a radio series kept him in the public eye, but his penchant for exaggeration, fantasy, and serious alcoholism led the FBI to recommend to other government agencies that he not be used in trials. Briefly institutionalized and administered shock treatments in the mid-1950s, he eventually went to work for the John Birch Society before dying in 1962.¹⁴

Even more reliable informers like Mary Stalcup Markward, recruited by the FBI in 1943 when she was just 21 years old, later became embarrassments. A beautician in Washington, she was apparently approached because several communists frequented the salon where she worked. Totally apolitical, she feigned interest in communism and joined the Party just three months after the FBI contacted her. By 1945 she was the treasurer of the Communist Party district encompassing DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia, writing regular reports on party meetings and personnel. Suffering from Multiple Sclerosis and under suspicion following stepped-up security efforts in the wake of informer testimony in the first Smith Act trial, Markward became less active after 1949 and was expelled as an informer in 1951. She went on to testify before HUAC and in the Maryland Smith Act trial in 1952 but lost her usefulness following her testimony before the SACB, during which she revealed she had not paid taxes on the \$25,000 she had been paid by the FBI.¹⁵

The series of local Smith Act trials that targeted Communist leadership in states ranging from California and New York to Michigan, Illinois, Colorado, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Washington, and Connecticut made extensive use of informants, most, like Markward, whom the FBI had determined had either outlived their usefulness as covert agents within the CPUSA or who had already come under suspicion as the CPUSA circled the wagons to deal with internal security.

The CPUSA remained convinced that it still harbored more informers. A number of high-level CPUSA officials were convicted in the initial Smith Act trials. They appealed their convictions and while out on bail and at the orders of the Party, several jumped bail and went into hiding. Most were tracked down and apprehended by the FBI. Documentary evidence is sparse, but it seems likely that informants inside the CPUSA assisted the Bureau in locating the fugitives. One of the bail jumpers was Gus Hall, who fled to Mexico. When FBI agents quickly located his hideout and, assisted by Mexican authorities, returned him to the United States, the CPUSA, suspicious that he had been

¹⁴Daniel Leab, *I Was a Communist for the FBI; The Unhappy Life and Times of Matt Cvetic* (University Park, Pennsylvania: State University Press, 2000).

¹⁵Vernon Pedersen, "Perfect Witness: Mary Stalcup Markward and the Dilemmas of Anti-communism," *American Communist History*, June 2009, pp. 29-48

betrayed, sent Herbert Aptheker, a Party intellectual, to Mexico to attempt to identify informants among its numerous American communist expatriates.

In 1950, Gil Green, one of those convicted in the first Smith Act trial, warned in the Party's theoretical magazine that:

At Foley Square [site of the 1949 trial] we witnessed a number of scummy stool pigeons take the stand and lie themselves blue in the face about our Party. But we knew then, and we know even more so today, that J. Edgar Hoover exposed only those of his Gestapo agents that were either in secondary position, had already outlived their usefulness or had doubles in the organization into which they had bored. He certainly did not expose his main agents and his network of brother rats.¹⁶

The use of nearly 100 informants in the various Smith Act trials did concern the FBI. By 1954 Hoover was worried that the need to use anywhere from five to seven informants in each of the trials had seriously depleted the FBI's stock, complaining about the number of "valuable current confidential informants" who had been unmasked. But two programs had already been launched to replenish the supply.¹⁷

Beginning in 1949 the Bureau had started to interview people who had left the Party or somehow indicated dissatisfaction with it. By December 1951 agents had contacted 1,446 individuals. Of these, 1,033 had been cooperative and 642 of them had not only provided information about their own activities, but also had discussed others. Strikingly, nearly 70% had appeared cooperative and about 45% had "informed" to some degree.¹⁸

Buoyed, no doubt, by these signs that significant numbers of Party members were disillusioned, the FBI launched a formal program, dubbed TOPLEV (Top Level) in September 1951 designed to recruit high-ranking members of the CPUSA as potential informants. (Most of those who had testified in the Smith Act trials held relatively minor Party positions.) By March 1954 agents had approached 601 people. Of these 30 had "been developed as informants or confidential sources," 556 had responded negatively, and others were being recontacted. Twenty Special Agents in six different field offices were working full-time on this program. There had been three "successful" interviews in Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Newark, four in Chicago, two in Detroit and Seattle, five in Los Angeles, seven in New York and one in Buffalo. Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Pittsburgh had conducted numerous interviews with no positive results. The two most spectacular successes of TOPLEV were the brothers Morris (Chicago) and Jack Childs (New York).¹⁹

Morris Childs has been born in the Russian Empire in 1902 and came to the U.S. in 1911, joining the CPUSA in 1921 and rising steadily in Party ranks. Tapped to attend the Comintern's International Lenin School in Moscow in the early 1930s, he was recruited by Soviet security as an informant on the ideological loyalty of other students. Back in the United States he served as the Party's regional leader, first in Wisconsin

¹⁶Gil Green, "For Communist Vigilance," *Political Affairs*, May 1950, pp. 117-118.

¹⁷Michal Belknap, *Cold War Political Justice: The Smith Act, the Communist Party, and American Civil Liberties* (Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 1977), p. 156.

¹⁸F.J. Baumgartner to A.H. Belmont, 12/04/1951, FBI file 100-358086-960x, pp. 54-55; F.J. Baumgartner to A.H. Belmont, 01/07/1952, 100-358086-1091X, pp. 56-57, both files in Communist Index-HQ-xrefs available at https://archive.org/details/foia_Communist_Index-HQ-xrefs.

¹⁹F.J. Baumgardner to A.H. Belmont, 03/15/1954, FBI file CPUSA-TOPLEV-HQ-68, pp. 1-6.

and then in Chicago. In 1947 he was appointed editor of the *Daily Worker*, the CPUSA's premier publication. Sidelined by bad health and inner-Party factionalism, Morris suffered a major heart attack in 1949 and was abandoned by his old comrades. For more than four years he lived as an invalid in isolation in Chicago.

Jack Childs had never been a prominent public figure in the CPUSA. He had joined after his brother did and toiled in the Party's secret apparatus, performing largely menial tasks. He, too, had been sent to Moscow in the early 1930s to be trained as a clandestine radio operator and courier. Back in the United States he worked as chauffeur and bodyguard to Party leader Earl Browder and assisted in raising money from wealthy Party sympathizers. Angered by the Party's treatment of Morris, and distracted by a son's serious illness, he quietly dropped out of the CPUSA in the late 1940s and focused on his small business in New York.²⁰

The FBI first contacted Jack and, through him, Morris. Both were receptive and began to cooperate. Initially, they provided information on their past careers in the Party. Within a few months Morris had identified twenty-six American communists who had assisted clandestine Soviet apparatuses. By late 1953 he had provided information about more than 500 top American Communists, including Comintern agents, underground apparatus workers, and Lenin School attendees.²¹

Jack, meanwhile, had provided information about the CPUSA's ring of wealthy donors, known as the Wall Street group, in the 1930s and 1940s. Both men discussed the key role played by Stanley Levison in donating, soliciting, and managing the CPUSA's money, information later to become politically explosive, when Levison emerged as a key advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr.²²

The FBI, however, wanted more than history and urged the brothers to reenter active Party work. The Bureau also provided Morris with funding to get much needed heart treatment at the Mayo Clinic to restore his health. The timing was fortuitous. The CPUSA was hemorrhaging membership and leadership from the multiple blows of government Smith Act prosecutions and fervent public anticommunism inflamed by the Cold War and the Korean War. When the Childs brothers cautiously reentered active Party activities, they were welcomed as returning veterans to shore up the depleted senior ranks of the Party, and the factional peccadilloes that had forced out Morris in 1947 were forgotten. Thus began what the FBI dubbed "Operation SOLO" that ran until age and ill-health forced the brothers to retire in the late 1970s.

Party leaders assigned Morris to supervise CPUSA relations with other Communist parties and to be the chief liaison with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In the latter role, Morris, assisted by Jack, arranged for the transmission of secret and illegal Soviet subsidies to the CPUSA. In 1958 Morris made his first trip to Moscow in his new role, arranging for the transfer of \$75,000. Morris also held long

²⁰Special Agent in Charge (hereafter SAC) New York to Director and Asst. Director FBI, 05/09/1952, Morris Childs FOIA FBI Chicago file part 1 (hereafter Morris Childs-Chicago-part #), p. 45, Internet Archive: archive.org/details/foia_Childs_Morris_Childs-Chicago-1.

²¹SAC Chicago to Director FBI (ATT: A.H. Belmont), 05/01/1952, Morris Childs-Chicago-1, pp. 20-31; SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 10/16/1952, Morris Childs-Chicago-2, pp. 53-58; SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 12/14/1952, Morris Childs-Chicago-5, p. 140.

²²SAC New York to Director FBI, 02/08/1952, Jack Childs FOIA FBI New York file part 1 (hereafter Jack Childs-NYC-part #), p. 3, Internet Archive: archive.org/details/foia_Childs_Jack_Childs-NYC-1; SAC New York to Director FBI, 06/19/1952, Jack Childs-NYC-1, p. 32; SAC New York to Director FBI, 06/24/1952, Jack Childs-NYC-1, p. 35.

political talks with Boris Ponomarev, head of the CPSU International Department, and Mikhail Suslov, one of the highest and most influential CPSU officials. Morris then went on to Beijing, where he met with Mao Zedong and other Chinese Communist leaders, reporting on the depth of the anger of Mao and other Chinese leaders toward Nikita Khrushchev's "revisionism."²³

This trip by Morris was the first of 58 Operation Solo missions abroad that the Childs brothers undertook- 53 by Morris, 5 by Jack- from 1958 to 1977. Over nearly twenty years they arranged the transfer of more than \$28 million in illegal secret subsidies from the Soviet Union to the CPUSA, all the while reporting the details of the clandestine funding, the political and ideological information they gathered, and useful gossip and intelligence about the activities of Communist parties around the world to the FBI. Operation Solo's reports on what senior Communist leaders in Moscow and elsewhere privately said when meeting with other senior Communists became a prized source of intelligence for the U.S. State Department and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Morris's last trip to Moscow was in 1977. Morris and Jack by that point were aging, and in poor health. Effectively, they retired from active Communist work, and Operation SOLO shut down in 1980 with Jack's death from a heart attack. SOLO was a remarkably successful intelligence operation, providing the U.S. government with valuable information not only about the CPUSA but also about Communist adversaries abroad.²⁴

Most other TOPLEV contacts obviously did not result in such impressive intelligence, but full information about who the informants were and what they did provide is still not available. Some files were considered so sensitive that they were kept in FBI HQ Room 6527 and segregated from the FBI's regular files along with other especially delicate and top-secret material dealing with communications intelligence, obscene material, confidential work at atomic energy installations, double agent operations, and the like. An FOIA release of "Confidential Files Maintained in Room 6527," contains fascinating but frustratingly opaque material on people whom the Bureau was most anxious to shield even from most of its agents and supervisors. A 1953 memo indicated that the TOPLEV program had developed "seven valuable informants." One was listed as having been recruited before Morris Childs (possibly Pat Toohey, see below). After Morris, identified only by his code - CG 5824-S, four more informants were listed, then NY 694-S (Jack Childs).²⁵

In 1957 one memo in this TOPLEV file noted that two existing informants whose files were being safeguarded had the same status as the Childs brothers and there was also a married couple who were both informants. In 1959 a male informant was added to this sensitive list and in 1961 it was noted that informant 100-415964 "is developing into an extremely valuable source." Several of these sources might well be people

²³SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 07/30/1958, FBI file100-428091 part 2, pp. 220-35 (hereafter referred to as SOLO-part #). The Solo file is available at the FBI FOIA vault: <https://vault.fbi.gov/solo> and at the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/FBI-Operation-Solo>. SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 08/08/1958, SOLO-part 4, p. 502.

²⁴A detailed account of SOLO is provided in John Barron's *Operation SOLO: The FBI's Man in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995). While journalistic, the book was prepared with FBI cooperation, as well as the cooperation of Morris Childs and his family.

²⁵Fred J. Baumgardner to Alan H. Belmont, 03/26/1953, Federal Bureau of Investigation records relating to Confidential Files Maintained In Room 6527, File 66-HQ-17404, p.138. (The confidential files first maintained in Room 6527 were later relocated to other rooms in the FBI headquarters.)

connected to, or working with Jack and Morris, including their wives, and Al Freeman and Schroeder Boulton, discussed below.²⁶

Several people who served on the Party's National Committee over the years were FBI informants. Morris Childs himself had served on the NC in the 1930s and 1940s but been dropped when he suffered a heart attack and was fired as editor of the *Daily Worker* in 1947. He was reelected in 1959 – albeit under a false name, C. Martin, from the Missouri-Kansas District. The Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago FBI office noted in 1961 that “several other highly placed Bureau sources ... serve on the NC.” Another report from 1971 noted that the informants the FBI maintained in the Party included eleven members of the CPUSA's National Committee (second only to the National Executive Committee in Party authority). In addition to the eleven National Committee informants, there was “another informant who is an ex-officio member of the National Committee because of the sensitive nature of his Party assignments. This latter source is also a member of the Political Committee which, in effect, runs the Party.” This was probably Morris Childs.²⁷

Although the names of these other National Committee members are not revealed in released FBI files, one was very likely another veteran Communist, Pat Toohey, a coal miner who joined the CPUSA in 1920 and served stints as a party organizer in Colorado and Puerto Rico. From 1937 to 1939 he was the Party's representative to the Comintern in Moscow. He led the Party in New Jersey in the 1950s before retiring to Florida.

The documentary record for Toohey's work as an informant is admittedly thin. During an interview with FBI agents late in his life, however, Morris Childs mentioned that he had always believed that Toohey, an old friend from shared organizing duties in the 1920s and 1930s, had been an FBI informant. Next to the typed transcript of the interview, an agent jotted down NY 559, MI 1010, apparent identifiers for a source who had provided information. By this time, Toohey had moved from the New York area (NY 559) to Miami (MI 1010). He died in 1978. Two retired FBI supervisors later confirmed that Toohey had, indeed, been a source. Toohey had been an ardent supporter of Earl Browder and it is possible that he was recruited after Browder's ouster, but nothing is available to indicate what kind of information he provided to the FBI.²⁸

The FBI considered inserting one National Committee member who served as an informant into the SOLO operation. In December 1960 a KGB officer who worked with him told Morris Childs that he wanted another person available in New York to serve as an intermediary between himself and Morris. Hoover told the Chicago and New York FBI offices that “this situation presents us with an opportunity of getting another of our informants in a position of trust with the CPUSA and with foreign CP's. We should take advantage of it. [Redacted] Negro, is a Chicago informant who is a former

²⁶FJB to AHB, 05/01/1957, p.184; FJB (JDD) to AHB, 09/04/1959, p. 33; FJB to William C. Sullivan, 08/07/1961, p. 26, all in FBI File 66-HQ-17404.

²⁷SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 08/18, 1961, Morris Childs-Chicago-part 24, p. 91; “Accomplishments: Communist Party, USA, Unit C,” 01/12/1971, FBI Domestic Intelligence Division-HQ-2, p. 21 (available at:

https://archive.org/details/foia_FBI_Domestic_Intelligence_Division-HQ-3/page/n105/mode/2up); 62-116395-586-Bulky,

“Inspection, Domestic Intelligence Division, August 17-September 9, 1971, p. 45.

²⁸David J. Garrow, “Epilogue: King, ‘SOLO FILE,’ and the FBI,” pp. 54-55, an unpublished update to David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From “SOLO” to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981). The authors thank David Garrow for sharing his “Epilogue.”

member of the CPUSA National Committee and National Executive Committee. He is a member of the Illinois CP State Committee and State Board; a member of the National Negro Commission; and is Chairman of the Illinois CP State Negro Commission.”²⁹

There are only a handful of black Chicago communists who were this prominent in the national organization, but none exactly matches the criteria mentioned by Hoover. Earl Durham, who served on the National Committee in 1957 and the National Executive Committee in 1958 is one possibility. Born in 1923 Durham graduated from Roosevelt College and received an MA at the University of Chicago after serving in WWII. He taught in the University of Illinois-Chicago school of social service administration for many years and did extensive community organizing. In 1957, the same year he was added to the National Committee, he was the CPUSA’s national youth secretary.³⁰

In a number of ways, however, Durham seems an unlikely informant. There was never a hint of his disaffection from the CPUSA. In the 1960s he was one of the organizers of a “gang summit” to work with the notorious Blackstone Rangers. He served as a speechwriter for Harold Washington, the first Black mayor of Chicago. When he died in 2007, contributions in his name were solicited for the communist-aligned National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression.³¹

Whether or not the FBI managed to recruit another black National Committee member nearly a decade later also remains unclear from files released thus far. In January 1968 John Haag and another agent whose name is redacted met with a black member of the CPUSA’s National Committee in a New York restaurant for more than an hour. At first the potential informant insisted that he had only come to “chew the fat with you cats,” and “hear you out,” but had no intention to cooperate. But his objections were made with less vigor as the conversation went on. He seemingly became more interested, Haag wrote in his report, “in how he could fit into the Justice Department-FBI picture than whether he could or would so fit.”

The agents told him they had read his articles in *Freedomways* and other venues, evaluated his background, and concluded he was a “sincere, militant, fully committed Black Nationalist,” but neither a Marxist-Leninist nor a Communist. They used flattery and praised his research but suggested “his time and talents were being wasted” in such “obscure and narrowly circulated publication[s]” and he could have more impact and do more to benefit blacks “by allying himself with the US government.” They were not interested in him as a mere informer – “he was too valuable for that” – but “as an evaluator or consultant.” He agreed that he “couldn’t go that counterintelligence bit” but wanted to know what he might do.

The agents challenged him to name “one single thing which the Communist Party had done for the Black man. He did not.” They then emphasized the recent efforts of the federal government on behalf of blacks and stressed the role of the FBI in these efforts. He was “then invited to join the Federal team” and he asked “How? What special thing could I do.” Avoiding specifics, the agents suggested he might evaluate black groups applying for federal funds to prevent them from going to communist-aligned

²⁹Director FBI to SAC Chicago, 01/27/1961, SOLO-part 27, pp. 221-22.

³⁰“Earl Durham,” https://keywiki.org/Earl_Durham

³¹“Earl L. Durham,” <https://legacy.suntimes.com/obituaries/chicagosuntimes/obituary.aspx?n=earl-l-durham&pid=97148175>.

organizations or help the government combat groups and individuals inimical to American interests. Given his “background and obvious intelligence, he is in a special position to render opinions.”

The potential recruit asked questions and “seemed satisfied that he could fit in.” He conceded “he could conceive of himself ‘working for the Government some time,’ but only under the right Administration and never ‘in good conscience’ with the Johnson Administration.” In response the agents noted that administrations come and go, but he shouldn’t let slip the chance “to put his own ideals and motivations into action.” Joining the government would not mean surrendering “his identity or independence.”

The agents found their dinner companion “intelligent ... good humored, dignified and serious” and “the meeting ended on an even friendlier note than it began.” He “promised to consider the matter carefully from all angles” and agreed to meet again later. At that future meeting, the report noted, “the fact that the Bureau will pay for services rendered will be made clear to him.” There is insufficient information to identify the individual in question and no indication in the files released thus far about how this conversation was followed up or whether the FBI snagged another informer. Still another possibility is that their contact was simply leading the agents on.³²

Two of the more remarkable and valuable FBI informants who have been definitively identified are an obscure radio operator and photographer and a prominent, wealthy, Wall Street executive. Both were part of the SOLO operation and their files may well have been held in Room 6527 since their informant activity involved high-level contact with Soviet sources. While some of their activities are well-documented, the full scope of what they did remains buried in unprocessed and destroyed FBI files.

Neither of the Childs brothers enjoyed robust health. As SOLO went on, producing more and more valuable intelligence and laundering more and more Soviet money, the FBI wanted to introduce additional operatives into the mix, both to relieve the burden the brothers faced and to prepare for the time when one or both died or was unable to continue working.³³

In 1961 the FBI believed it had found someone. Schroder Boulton was a rather unlikely informant, but then he was an unlikely communist. Born in Brooklyn NY in 1909, he was the grandson of one of its mayors and the scion of a banking family. He graduated from Columbia University in 1936. Even before finishing college, he started work on Wall Street. For 67 years he made his career with some of its major investment banking firms, including Lazard Freres & Company. When he retired in 1998, he was first vice president of Tucker Anthony.³⁴

When and how he became associated with communism is unclear. Apparently never a formal member of the CPUSA, he was accepted as a communist because he had attended Party meetings and was “known to and respected” by some Party leaders. Beginning in the 1930s he was a regular financial contributor to Party coffers as part of what was called the Wall Street Group, giving \$1,000 a year. Its liaison to the CPUSA

³²SAC NY to Director FBI, 01/31/1968, SOLO-part 120, pp. 173-77. The FBI had several known black informants. One of the few written about by historians was Julia Brown. Veronica Wilson, “To Tell All My People’: Race, Representations, and John Birch Society Activist Julia Brown” in Kathleen M. Blee and Sandra McGee (eds), *Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay Across Borders* (Penn State University Press, University Park, PA, 2012) pp. 242-56.

³³Director FBI to SAC Chicago, 05/23/1962, SOLO-part 42, pp. 98-99.

³⁴“Schroeder Boulton, 91, Wall St. Executive,” *New York Times*, 02/23/2000, p. C27.

had been Jack Childs. Moreover, Boulton “had been the investment counselor relied upon by the CP” and used to invest Party funds. In February 1961, with Jack Child’s approval, the FBI launched an effort to recruit Boulton, who had for several years been out of contact with Party officials. Boulton was “persuaded to cooperate,” although whether his political views had changed, or he had been disillusioned by the turmoil in the communist world that had begun in 1956 is not clear. Having been primed by the FBI, he met with Jack and, unaware that Jack was also an FBI informant, agreed to consult with Party leaders.³⁵

On a visit to Moscow in July 1961, Jack was assured that the Soviets were very interested in Boulton, and that the KGB was intrigued by him. Boulton, for his part, was warned by the FBI that he might be contacted for information, not only by such CPUSA officials as Gus Hall, but also by Soviet personnel and told of “the tremendous potential value to the U.S. Government and the FBI” of his ability “to interpret and evaluate” information he picked up. For the FBI, Boulton was someone “whom we can control completely.”³⁶

In 1962 Hoover briefed the Chicago FBI office about Boulton, who was being supervised by the New York office. He had written financial-economic papers for Gus Hall and “is being slowly and deliberately activated into the financial area of the CP.” There was hope that he might be inserted into the SOLO apparatus and have contact “with high-level Soviet personnel.”³⁷

The Chicago office expressed some reservations. Boulton had minimal Party history, no training in Marxism, and no long personal ties with Soviet leaders. While it was doubtful if he could take over Morris’s political responsibilities that involved dealing with Soviet leaders, he might prove useful as a courier. Since he was, however, an extremely busy man, his ability to respond as quickly as needed to demands made by either the CPUSA or the USSR was constrained. Morris and Jack were “full-time people in this operation” and Boulton did not have their flexibility.³⁸

Boulton, the FBI concluded, needed to be developed “in his own right as an informant and not exclusively as a replacement for any other informer.” He was the right age, race, and background. He was a volunteer; “he will not accept payment” for his services to the FBI. While obviously not a Party insider, his financial expertise gave him gravitas. His regular job might limit the time he could devote to SOLO, but it also provided excellent cover.³⁹

When Boulton and his wife planned a tour that included the Soviet Union in 1966, Gus Hall wrote to Leonid Brezhnev to urge him to arrange a special tour. Hall and Morris Childs suggested that he have an opportunity to meet with prominent Soviet economists. On his trip, Boulton did meet with several, including Vladimir Pavlichenko,

³⁵SAC New York to Director FBI, 02/02/1961, Jack Childs-NY-part-subA7-8, pp. 18-23; SAC New York to Director FBI, 05/02/1962, SOLO-part 42, p. 25; SAC New York to Director FBI, 04/27/1961, Jack Childs-NY-part subA7-8, pp.70-73.

³⁶SAC New York to Director FBI, 07/28/1961, Jack Childs-NY-26, pp. 69-70; SAC New York to Director FBI, 07/28/1961, SOLO-part 33, pp. 34-35; F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan, 08/07/1961, SOLO-part 33, pp. 74-77; Director FBI to SAC New York, 05/23/1962, SOLO-part 42, pp. 98-99.

³⁷SAC New York to Director FBI, 05/02/1962, SOLO-part 42, pp. 25-28.

³⁸SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 05/17/1962, SOLO-part 42, pp. 100-09.

³⁹SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 06/05/1962, SOLO-part 42, pp. 209-11.

Assistant Scientific Secretary-General of the Academy of Science, and began a practice of sending him material relating to American economic matters.⁴⁰

Over the next several years, Boulton succeeded in cementing the trust of both CPUSA and Soviet officials. In 1970 he notified the FBI that he would participate in “another financial conference” for early January with Victor Perlo, Lem Harris, Jack Childs and “hopefully,” Gus Hall. Boulton was also regularly in touch with Pavlichenko, his Soviet contact, occasionally mailing him private firm material. In May Hall held another meeting with Jack and Boulton at Boulton’s apartment. Impressed by Boulton’s judgment and track record of predicting the direction of the American economy, Hall complained that “his [own, Communist] writers and economists have always been wrong.”⁴¹

Unfortunately, FOIA material released as of 2021 contains no more information about Boulton’s activities. He remained active in liberal politics in New York: he and his second wife turned their Greenwich Village apartment into a meeting place for civil rights workers. Shortly before his death at age 91, David Garrow, who had uncovered the SOLO operation, telephoned to ask about his work for the FBI, but Boulton, clearly confused, was unresponsive. He died in 2000.

In 1964 the FBI found a perfect candidate to assist Jack, and, it hoped, eventually take over his role. The saga of Albert (Al) Freeman has remained largely hidden, even as the story of Operation SOLO has been trumpeted. Even now, the records of Freeman’s activities are sparse; only bits and pieces have emerged from FBI files. The FBI has insisted that its file on Al Freeman was destroyed years ago and the National Records and Archives Administration claims to have only a small file which has yet to be processed. The material that has emerged from other FBI files, however, is enough to tell a remarkable story.

Al Freeman had a long history of doing behind-the-scenes grunt work for the CPUSA and the Comintern. He was born in New York in 1906 to Russian-born parents. A high-school dropout, in 1927 he enrolled at the RCA Institute to train as a radio operator. Within a year he had been promoted to instructor. Three years later, assisted by Leon Josephson, a Comintern agent, and Jack Childs he traveled to the Soviet Union and began work at a training school outside Moscow. Al’s expertise as a radio operator enabled him to move swiftly through the course; within six months he began to undertake clandestine work for the Communist International, traveling throughout Europe between 1931 and 1938 to build and repair short-wave radios for covert communications with Moscow.⁴²

When he returned to New York, Jack Childs advised him to “lay low.” Although he continued to pay Party dues, he eschewed any open work with the CPUSA. Enlisting in the Marines during World War II, he served as a photographer at Paris Island and Quantico and was mustered out as a sergeant around 1946.⁴³

⁴⁰SAC New York to Director FBI, 03/25/1966, SOLO-part 101, p. 4; SAC New York to Director FBI, 04/29/1966, SOLO-part 102, p. 59; SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 11/21/1966, SOLO-part 110, p. 78.

⁴¹SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 01/12/1971, Jack Childs-NYC-part 16a-18a, p. 5; Special agent redacted to SAC New York, 05/24/1971, Jack Childs-NYC-part 16a-18a, pp. 181-82.

⁴²Eulogy for Albert Freeman delivered by his nephew John Spiegel, on December 9, 2007, courtesy of John Spiegel; Biographical material from Comintern archives in possession of John Spiegel, sent to Al Freeman in 2004 from Herb Romerstein.

⁴³Garrow, “Epilogue,” p. 43, n.113.

In the early 1950s Jack Childs gave the FBI Al's name as someone whom he had sent to Moscow for radio training. He also mentioned that he had recently met Al and learned that at the request of Leon Josephson, he and John Spivak, a long-time operative of the Party underground, had broken into the law office of O. John Rogge, attorney for David Greenglass, to photograph files that might be useful in the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.⁴⁴

While the FBI had Al's name by 1954, it did not contact him until 1959. He met intermittently with agents for several years, apparently cordial but largely uncommunicative. While available records do not indicate the reason for his about-face, in November 1963, Al announced he was willing to "help his government," noting that "no one can be a Communist and a loyal American."⁴⁵

He admitted that he "had made a great mistake in his life," and disclosed that he had been recruited into clandestine work by Josephson and Jack Childs, whom he identified as "the key man" of the underground operation. The agents suggested that his first assignment would be to find out if Jack was still active in underground activity. And there was a ready-made opportunity. When Al had returned to the USA in 1937, his father, Boris, who had also gone to the USSR for radio training, had remained behind. Al had not heard from him since 1947.⁴⁶

Al got in touch with Jack, asking for his help in locating his father. Jack, of course, knew that the FBI was "playing" Al, who believed that he was spying on Jack Childs, still working for the Soviets. Jack sent a coded telegram to a Soviet contact in March 1964 asking for a trace on Boris, explaining that he and Morris were considering recruiting Al for their apparatus. In June the Soviets replied that he had died of natural causes on February 5, 1953, in Volsk and gave the location where he was interred.⁴⁷

Even before this news arrived, Jack had assigned Al to clear a drop for clandestine messages from the Russians while Jack traveled out of the country. The KGB gave informal approval for the Childs brothers to use Al for ciphering, coding, and short-wave work in July 1964. Gus Hall, the CPUSA leader, also gave his approval for the Childs brothers to use Al Freeman in their apparatus. By 1967 according to the FBI, Freeman "now directly participates in the day-to-day operation of the apparatus," monitoring the radio for transmissions from the Soviets.⁴⁸

His KGB contacts continuously pressed Jack Childs to have Al Freeman travel to Moscow for several months of training, but Al's regular job precluded a long absence and he feared for his safety. The FBI, however, believed that such training would cement Al's position as a trusted Soviet contact. In addition to his work for the KGB, he was, it noted, its first informant "ever to penetrate" a certain "closed group" of the Communist Party that meets "clandestinely for security reasons." Beginning in November 1967 he received \$300 a month in salary as well as expenses. The FBI assured him that he would suffer no financial loss if he devoted himself to the SOLO

⁴⁴Garrow, "Epilogue," p. 48.

⁴⁵SAC New York to Director FBI, 09/13/1963, SOLO-part 49, pp. 106-09.

⁴⁶SAC New York to Director FBI, 12/03/1963, SOLO-part 49, pp. 200-04.

⁴⁷SAC New York to Director FBI, 03/18/1964, SOLO-part 59, pp.10-11; C.F. Downing to Mr. Conrad, 06/16/1964, SOLO-part 63, pp. 42-43; F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan, 05/19/1964, SOLO-part 62, pp. 196-99.

⁴⁸F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan, 05/19/1964, SOLO-part 62, pp. 196-99; SAC New York to Director FBI, 04/24/1967, SOLO-part 114, p. 5-8; SAC New York to Director FBI, 10/25/67, SOLO-part 117, pp. 199-202.

operation full-time, promising to reimburse him if he lost his job, and committed to purchase a \$100 US savings bond each month for his retirement. And, the Bureau appealed to his patriotism, extolling the “value of the work he has done to date ... and the inestimable rewards that could accrue to the United States if he would give his assent.”⁴⁹

The pleas and the financial guarantees worked. Al enthusiastically accepted “this awesome responsibility and challenge.” Although no FBI files dealing with Al after 1968 have been processed, his nephew has confirmed that, according to his widow, he spent three months in the USSR starting in January 1969.⁵⁰

Based on the conversations mentioned in the SOLO files, it is impossible to tell if Al ever learned that the Childs brothers were also FBI informants. For at least the first several years after his recruitment, he had still believed that he was spying on the brothers for the Bureau. Because so few FBI SOLO files after 1968 have been released, exactly what Al Freeman did after agreeing to go to the Soviet Union is impossible to determine.

In an interview with a local newspaper, the *Riverdale Press* in 2007, the 101-year-old Freeman recounted his years as an American spy, mixing accurate details with embellished stories. He claimed that his relationship with the FBI lasted until 1991, a full decade after Morris and Jack had been exposed as FBI informants. A plaque and letter he received from the FBI hailed his service to the United States from 1963 to 1991. Had he escaped Soviet and CPUSA suspicion after the men who had recruited him into their apparatus been revealed as informants? Had he been questioned by either the KGB or Gus Hall? Had he continued to work as a liaison with the USSR for the CPUSA? Unless the FBI locates files it claims no longer to have, the full story of Al Freeman and his remarkable career will remain incomplete.⁵¹

The Soviet Union was certainly worried about government agents in the CPUSA. In Moscow in January 1959, Morris Childs was told that the CPUSA needed to strengthen its security apparatus and mount a campaign to expose FBI spies. Morris told his FBI handler that he did not bring this topic up when he met with Party leader Gene Dennis upon returning to the United States but had concluded he would soon have to do so. The FBI naturally was not anxious to have the CPUSA begin an effort to expose its assets but recognized that if Childs did not forward the request, he might himself come under suspicion. The Bureau warned its field offices that the Party might soon begin an effort to expose informants.⁵²

The highest profile casualty of the USSR’s suspicion was Clarence Hathaway, a veteran Party leader who had held key positions ever since the 1920s. A charter member of the Party, Hathaway had attended the first class at the Lenin School in Moscow in the late 1920s. He had been the district organizer in Chicago and editor of the *Daily*

⁴⁹SAC New York to Director FBI, SOLO-part 118, pp. 165-69; SAC New York to Director FBI, 02/19/1968, SOLO-part 120, pp. 231-35; SAC New York to Director FBI, 01/10/1968, SOLO-part 120, p. 54; SAC New York to Director FBI, 10/18/1967, SOLO-part 117, pp. 189-92; Director FBI to SAC New York, 03/05/1968, SOLO-part 120, pp. 265-69; SAC New York to Director FBI, 05/07/1968, SOLO-part 123, pp. 134-36; SAC New York to Director FBI, 03/08/1968, SOLO-part 121, pp. 199-204.

⁵⁰SAC New York to Director FBI, 05/07/1968, SOLO-part 123, pp. 134-36; John Spiegel to Harvey Klehr

⁵¹Tommy Hallissey, “The Freeman Identity,” *Riverdale Press*, 09/20/2007. William Sessions to Albert Freeman, February 14, 1992, provided by John Spiegel.

⁵²SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 03/25/1959, SOLO-part 11, pp. 8-10.

Worker in the 1930s, while serving as Party leader Earl Browder's closest aide. In 1936 the Comintern questioned the CPUSA's recommendation that he be promoted from a candidate to a full member of the Party's Politburo. Citing his heavy drinking and "a single – true, an unverified – moment" in his record, it blocked his promotion. By 1939, the Comintern had concluded that he was a clear and present danger. In addition to his drinking, it alleged that he had been on the wrong side of several factional disputes in the CPUSA, that for three months in 1912 he had served in the Minnesota National Guard, and that his ex-wife had claimed he had worked for a private detective agency in 1919. He was expelled from the CPUSA in 1940. Readmitted sometime after WWII, Hathaway was chosen for the National Committee in 1959 and put in charge of the New York District the following year.⁵³

In February 1960 his Soviet contacts in the American section of the International Department of the CPSU asked Jack Childs for information on Hathaway, whom they had just learned was now a member of the National Committee (NC). They later informed him that according to their archival records, Hathaway had been an agent of the FBI in 1920 and had been seen in contact with it in 1941 and again in 1947.⁵⁴

In a discussion with Gus Hall and Gene Dennis a month later, Morris Childs told them what the Soviets had said about Hathaway, and, he reported to the FBI, it "knocked out both Dennis and Hall." The former said he wouldn't "be able to sleep for rest of week." Hall recollected that after hearing that Hathaway had been placed on the NC, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn had told him she had heard from someone that he had been accused in the past of being an FBI agent. Later, at a party for Hathaway, Hall mentioned the rumor to him and was surprised that neither Hathaway nor his wife reacted at all, neither indignant nor laughed it off. Dennis then recalled that around 1939 or 1940 Leon Josephson had been assigned to investigate Hathaway, with stories swirling about his behavior. Hathaway's first wife confirmed he had been a private detective, but Josephson was unable to prove that he'd been involved in strikebreaking. In 1943 he'd fled with Party money and a woman to Arizona and been expelled from the CPUSA (Dennis seems to have gotten the date and perhaps the circumstances wrong). To further complicate things, Hathaway was being considered for a position on the National Executive Committee (NEC) and if he was ousted as head of the New York Party, the left-wing faction, led by Ben Davis would take over the district. Dennis proclaimed: "I am sick," and "we are in a hell of a fix."⁵⁵

While Hall was suspicious of Hathaway, he instructed Morris to ask the Soviets if they had concrete evidence. Meanwhile, Hathaway had to be kept on the NEC temporarily for "tactical reasons." When the Soviets told Morris in July that they had nothing conclusive, he replied that acting against Hathaway was not possible. A severe illness

⁵³"Information on candidacies nominated for the PB CC CPUSA from secretariat Com. Marty," 8 February 1936, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) 515-1-3966; "Re proposal Polburo . . .," 10 February 1936, RGASPI 515-1-3961; Gulyaev and Stetsenko to Dimitrov, 26 November 1939, RGASPI 495-74-472, all three documents reproduced in Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 44-48.

⁵⁴SAC New York to Director FBI, 03/17/1960, SOLO-part 18, pp. 246-47.

⁵⁵SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 03/14/1960, SOLO-19, pp. 29-32.

provided an excuse to sideline Hathaway from Party leadership in 1961, and he died in January 1963.⁵⁶

One technique the FBI used to disrupt the CPUSA in the 1950s through the 1970s was to frame genuine communists as informants. The methods utilized ranged from having an authentic informant start a rumor about the target to anonymous letters or phone calls. When the Childs brothers themselves were endangered by two columns published by journalist Victor Reisel in 1964, the FBI launched a COINTELPRO operation to convince communist officials that William Albertson, the leader of the New York CP, was an FBI informant. Forging a letter purportedly written by Albertson to his FBI handler and planting it in a car in which he had been a passenger, the FBI upended Party activities in the Empire State, leading to a series of investigations that seemed to verify the handwriting as Albertson's and resulted in his expulsion from the Party and several years of discord over whether he had been framed.⁵⁷

TOPLEV was not the only effort to recruit informants and the vast majority of FBI informants were ordinary Party members either holding low-level positions or just passive members who attended meetings and demonstrations. Domestic Intelligence Division Inspection Reports in William Sullivan's and Alan Belmont's Personnel files give an accurate picture of the total number of informants run by the FBI as the Party imploded in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1958 there were 408 within the CPUSA – the largest number to that point. There were 412 in 1959, 433 in 1960 and 401 in 1962. The 1960 figure was estimated to represent 7.86% of the total Party membership of 5,531.⁵⁸

By 1970 the CPUSA was a shell of its former self. In June 1971 the FBI established a Security Informant Unit and it reported that while it had 264 member informants in the CPUSA that number had dropped to 226 by the middle of August, in large part due to budgetary constraints. The FBI's informant network in the CPUSA was only a part, and far from the largest part, of its domestic intelligence informant program. It also recruited many hundreds of informants in Trotskyist and Maoist organizations, the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups, neo-Nazi groups, and Black nationalist groups. The U.S. Senate Church committee reported that the FBI had more than 1,500 domestic intelligence informants as of June 30, 1975.⁵⁹

Most FBI informants were never called to testify in Smith Act trials, congressional hearings, or deportation cases and were able, if they wished, to remain anonymous. The Freedom of Information Act, authorizing the release of FBI files, contained a provision exempting the release of any information that would expose the identity of FBI sources. Occasionally, however, inadvertent disclosures permit the identification of an informant.

⁵⁶SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 03/29/1960, SOLO-20, pp. 22-23; SAC New York to Director FBI, 08/12/1960, SOLO-21, p. 142.

⁵⁷Church Committee report, pp. 189-90; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, "Framing William Albertson: The FBI's 'SOLO' Operation and the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (2020), 22, pp. 63-85.

⁵⁸FBI informants chart prepared by David Garrow titled "Data below taken from Domestic Intelligence Division Inspection Reports dated 1958-1960, 12/11/62, 7/31/64, 5/20/65, 6/1/66 which appear in WC Sullivan's Personnel File or Alan Belmont Personnel File." The authors thank David Garrow for sharing this chart.

⁵⁹"Security Informant Program: Basic Revolutionary and New Left Organizations," 08/19/1971, FBI Domestic Intelligence Division-HQ-3, p. 107 (available at: https://archive.org/details/foia_FBI_Domestic_Intelligence_Division-HQ-3/page/n105/mode/2up); "Accomplishments: Communist Party, USA, Unit C," 01/12/1971, FBI Domestic Intelligence Division-HQ-2, p. 21; Church Committee Report, p. 228; a five part summary history of FBI investigation and infiltration of the KKK is at: <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2010/february/the-fbi-versus-the-klan-part-1>.

Within that portion of that part of the enormous SOLO that has been released, there are hints and information that identify several.

One informant revealed by the SOLO files is Robert Koester, a young Chicagoan who became a well-known music impresario. In June 1968, Morris Childs met with a KGB officer anxious for the CPUSA to set up a cover business to facilitate the transfer of funds; Childs, without naming him, mentioned a “young man in Chicago who currently operated a record business, was formerly active in youth work but who has been relatively inactive for some time.” The FBI report on the meeting noted that “it is understood that [Childs] was referring to Robert Koester, a CPUSA member from Chicago.”⁶⁰

Koester ran a record business in Chicago. A January 1968 FBI memo, while redacting his name, noted that he was a “source,” who had been contacted by a Chicago communist about “possibilities for investment of CP funds in the informant’s business – between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Koester had been active in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and been a member of the Chicago CP for 5-6 years. He was described by the FBI as “an individual of extreme loyalty and dedication” who was agreeable to the “possibility of taking an assignment of utmost importance” at some future date.⁶¹

No additional information on Koester is in the released FBI files. Born in 1932, a jazz enthusiast since high school, he had moved to Chicago in 1958 and purchased a record store the following year. Over the following decade, he relocated and expanded the store several times. He also owned Delmark Records Studio that recorded and released numerous jazz and blues recordings that became classics. In 1996 he was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame.⁶²

An informant from Los Angeles, William Divale, attended a nine-week Party leadership school in the spring of 1968 before returning to California to finish his degree at UCLA and earn a PhD in anthropology from SUNY-Buffalo in 1974. He had been utilized in operations against anti-war groups. The FBI mulled transferring him to New York to work on SOLO. In a weird coincidence, while attending the Party school, Divale, who later publicly testified about his activities, was assigned by the CPUSA to live full-time with Gibby Needleman, who had supervised a ring of Soviet spies, including one who had worked at Los Alamos.⁶³

SOLO files contain several descriptions of other informers and potential informers, but without sufficient detail to uncover their identities. A young Chicago man who had traveled extensively in Europe and knew Gus Hall had transferred into the professional section of the Illinois CP. He was willing to move his business to New York if the FBI asked. Another Chicagoan worked at St. Luke’s Hospital and was studying for his doctorate in social work at Northwestern. He had indicated “he is ready to go all the way with us.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰SAC New York to Director FBI, 07/03/1968, SOLO-part 124, p. 267.

⁶¹SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 01/02/1968, SOLO-part 20, pp. 25-26; SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 01/31/1968, SOLO-part 20, pp. 165-66; SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 07/02/1968, SOLO-part 124, pp. 248-49; SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 08/05/1968, SOLO-part 125, pp. 220-22.

⁶²“Bob Koester,” Wikipedia, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070409180602/http://delmark.com/delmark.history.htm>.

⁶³Director FBI to SAC New York, 04/24/1968, SOLO-part 122, pp. 228-30; SAC Los Angeles to Director FBI, 05/10/1968, SOLO-123, pp. 196-97; Garrow, “Epilogue,” n. 17. Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, “On the Trail of a Fourth Soviet Spy at Los Alamos,” *Studies in Intelligence*, September 2019, pp. 1-14.

⁶⁴SAC Chicago to Director FBI, 10/26/1967, SOLO-part 118, pp. 6-10.

One old Party member, active in the 1930s, became an informer in 1951 but was deactivated the following year when his Party membership ended, perhaps as a result of the Party's going underground. He rejoined in 1960 and resumed his work for the FBI, but employment and health issues limited his activity with the CP, and he was dropped as an informant in 1962. He was successfully operating a small business for the General Tire Company in New York in 1968 when the FBI considered recontacting him.⁶⁵

In 1973 the Chicago FBI office noted that a confidential informant, CG 6474-S, who had been working for the FBI since 1961, and had been groomed for three years to replace Morris Childs in SOLO, had been told that no more money was available to pay her, and she decided to quit. She was "in a slow process of disengagement from the CPUSA, having agreed to have it "occur more slowly and naturally and therefore not do any damage to the SOLO operation" and Morris, who had already accepted her as his replacement. No further information on this valuable informant or what happened to her is currently available.⁶⁶

Conclusion

From its origins the CPUSA was plagued by real government informants and bogus charges of informing leveled against some of its leading figures, sometimes from the Soviet Union. The Party itself often engaged in internal witch hunts and attacked ideological dissidents as tools of the government. The available evidence, however, suggests that there was no systematic or large-scale government effort to infiltrate the Party until the late-1930s. As the CPUSA became a more significant feature of American life with the inauguration of the Popular Front in 1936 and briefly aligned itself with Nazi Germany in 1939, it attracted more investigative interest.

Regardless of the period, there was always a ready supply of potential informants at hand. Throughout its history, the Party's membership was always in flux. Members came in and most went out quickly, as the Party line zigged and zagged. Disillusioned communists were never hard to find. So too were ordinary Americans willing to join the Party at the behest of the FBI, either for pecuniary or patriotic reasons. Others may have had a craving for adventure or excitement. Some were not very attractive individuals. Living a life of deceit within the CPUSA, they also sometimes behaved reprehensively, drinking to excess, lying, or engaging in illegal activities. Some later exaggerated their exploits or provided little more than mundane details about legal political activities; as described above, others engaged in dangerous activities involving contact with foreign intelligence agencies and illegal activities, including money laundering and smuggling.

Informants clearly exacerbated the considerable difficulties that the CPUSA faced in trying to gain influence in American life. In May 8, 1958 letters to Robert Cutler, Special Assistant to President Eisenhower, and to Attorney General William Rogers, Hoover reported that in August, 1956, the Bureau had initiated a program designed to promote disruption within the ranks of the CPUSA. Techniques used included use of

⁶⁵Director FBI to SAC New York, 04/30/1968, SOLO-part 123, pp. 78-80.

⁶⁶"Data From Operational Conference 2/9/76," three-page typed transcript, John Barron Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, Hoover Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, cited in Garrow, "Epilogue," p. 80.

informants to engage in controversial discussions, after which "acrimonious debates ensued, suspicions were aroused, and jealousies fomented." On January 10, 1961, Hoover sent a five-page top secret memo to the incoming Kennedy administration Secretary of State (Dean Rusk), Attorney General (Robert Kennedy), and Deputy Attorney General (Byron White) setting forth the overall activities of the CPUSA and detailing the FBI "counterattack against the CPUSA." The letter outlined informant penetration of the Party at all levels and use of various techniques to keep the Party off-balance and disillusioned. Given the small size and ineffectiveness of the CPUSA at the time, it was akin to pummeling a dead horse.⁶⁷

Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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⁶⁷Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, book III, *Final Report of the U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1976), pp. 65-66, 263-64, 266. The Church Committee Report includes additional material on FBI reports from 1959 and 1960 detailing FBI use of informants to promote disillusionment and disruption in the Party, pp. 71, 287-89.